

DISCOVERY OF LARVAL CASE OF
PROTEROSPASTIS MERDELLA (ZELLER)
 (LEPIDOPTERA, TINEIDAE) IN ASSOCIATION
 WITH SPIDER'S WEB AT GHAR DALAM (CAVE),
 MALTA

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Abstract

The larval case of *Proterospastis merdella* (Lepidoptera, Tineidae), found attached to a spider's web in a Maltese cave (Ghar Dalam, S.E. Malta) is described for the first time. Case, moth and genitalia are figured.

In August 1979 the writer initiated a one-year study of the biology of Ghar Dalam based on monthly surveys. During one of these visits to the Cave, a larval case (ZM/Gh.D.6) was found suspended from a spider's web attached to the cave wall close to the floor and about 3 metres from the cave entrance. At some time between collection (11/X/79) and re-examination of the collected items eight months later (2/VI/80), the adult had emerged and died. The larva was never seen. The moth was subsequently identified by Dr. Gaden S. Robinson of the British Museum (Natural History) as *Proterospastis merdella* (Zeller) ♀, a microlepidopteron whose larval case was hitherto unknown to science.

The aim of this short note is to give the first record and description of this larval case and to record also its association with a spider's web in a Maltese cave.

The Cave. Ghar Dalam is a natural waterworn cave, a 160m long phraeatic tube on the south east side of the Island, situated about 250m from the coast (St. George's Bay, Birzebuga). Only the outermost 80m are accessible to visitors. The cave's entrance faces southwest and overlooks the valley. It stands 6.1m above the valley bed and is 15.24m above sea level. Except for the outermost few metres and the innermost part (inaccessible to the public), the cave is artificially lit by bulbs.

The larval case. The case of *P. merdella* is a lead grey, dorsoventrally flattened, long ovoid structure with an embayment on either side just above the equator. Maximum width of embayment under review is 3.5mm. The ends are blunt, of unequal width (2.1mm and 1.9mm respectively) and with fluffy edges. Low magnification microscopy reveals a surface that is irregularly knobby and pitted. Total length of case is 10.65mm, maximum depth 1.5mm and maximum width 4mm, but only 3mm at the constriction.

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Fig. 1

Proterospastis merdella (Zeller) Larval case and moth.
Spider's web, Ghar Dalam, Malta. (Scale bar = 1mm).

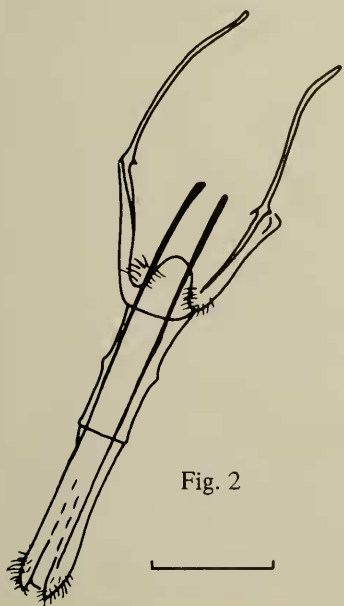


Fig. 2

Fig. 2

Genitalia of above ♀ moth.
(Scale bar = 0.5mm).